

MAY 1944

# SIGHT AND SOUND

VOL 12 NO 49

ARTICLES: THOSE CRITICS  
THE BURY FILM GROUP  
THE FILM STRIP  
BRITISH SCRIPT WRITING  
COMBINED FILM OPERATIONS

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Darrel F. Catling

6<sup>D</sup>.

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# Sight and Sound

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# COMBINED OPS.

By WINIFRED HOLMES

*Tunisian Victory* sets the mind working on all kinds of possibilities for future film operations of a combined character. By their very nature films cannot be a one-man art, the art of the individualist, as is painting, composing, writing. They must be based on the combined ideas and efforts of many brains, many techniques. Behind each film there may be a master mind—the director's, the producer's, sometimes the writer's or the editor's. But that mind cannot be megalomaniac; it must welcome and absorb suggestions and seek expert advice on detail in much the same way as Lord Louis Mountbatten and General Eisenhower in another field.

## An International Art

But although the film is a group or communal art, until now it has been a purely national one, although it may aim at international audiences. That is as it should be when the film takes human drama—the personal story—for its subject rather than a theme such as a battle or a scientific discovery. It may be argued that directors, like mercenaries, may sometimes serve a national industry other than their own. But when René Clair comes to Britain to direct a film it becomes a British film by the time it is finished, and the same is true of Fritz Lang in Hollywood. Directors of their stamp may be individual enough to impose their own techniques on a given film, but they cannot impose on it a French or German character. The British or American actors and technicians who carry out the Frenchman's or the German's wishes subtly and unconsciously turn the film into something hall-marked Made in Britain or the U.S.A.

*Tunisian Victory*—a joint product of British and American service film units and studios—is in a different category altogether. And so are the future combined films I visualise after seeing it. First, they cannot attempt to be under-the-skin human dramas. Those should remain national products the deepest expression of nationality as in the pre-war French cinema. Instead, their stories must be documentaries—some international project undertaken, perhaps, in the interests of the human race. If collaboration such as the Anglo-American collaboration to free Africa from the Germans can succeed surely collaboration on such a scale can at least be attempted in peacetime in the interests of construction. Or is that only a pious hope?

## International Objectives

Perhaps to increase the fertility of the earth the nations may undertake to reclaim and irrigate the Gobi desert or the Sahara. . . . Perhaps they may help China in some gigantic feat of engineering, designed to put an end forever to the terrible Yangtse floods. . . . There is much talk of an international system of policing the world by air. . . . But whatever these combined operations may be, the conception of them must be a grand one, grand enough to recognise no barriers, to allow for no jostling for place or power or profit, of no narrow jealousies of rival sovereignties. I believe that the mere conceiving of such undertakings, and the actual striving to carry them out, whether they are ultimately successful or not, will go far towards making wars less possible in the future.

And here film-makers have a vital function. Their's will be the task of interpreting these vast undertakings to



the people who cannot go there to see for themselves, but whose assent and contributions are essential to the carrying-out of the schemes. So, film-makers, please look at *Tunisian Victory* with an eye on the future. It is a new departure in cinema; perhaps the most significant ever taken. Utopian? Impossible? Utopian perhaps but not impossible. The League of Nations when working constructively—to improve workers' conditions, to stabilise legislation concerning child labour and pregnancy, to pool knowledge and resources to fight disease, to strangle the opium traffic—worked in international goodwill and an honest endeavour to benefit humanity, irrespective of race or sovereignty. Only when it worked negatively, defensively, with each nation thinking of its own safety first, did it break down.

### International Enterprises

Already in normal times certain international enterprises exist which would make fascinating combined film subjects. The fishing industry of the North Sea, carried on by British, Danish, and Norwegian fishermen, with mutually agreed lines of demarcation and convenient arrangements for marketing, is one. The whaling industry, another. Certain Dominion-British subjects, as our dependence on Canada, Australia, New Zealand for special food products, are others. The international advances of science in preventing and curing disease would provide many wonderful film subjects. And, just as the work itself is international so, as far as is practicable, the films depicting it should be made jointly by the nations chiefly concerned. Only then can they truly express that sense of common purpose and common endeavour which is greater than any man-made barriers and which is so vital to the future peace of the world.

There are many difficulties, of course. Language differences to begin with. But they can be got over easily

enough if the will to do so is there. A film made by two nations, joined in a common undertaking, will reveal and harmonise both points of view, instead of just one point of view on a common theme.

That is why *Tunisian Victory* will appeal to both British and American audiences. The different points of view, the different ways of looking at the same things, or describing things, are both represented in it and represented harmoniously. Only at the end of the film some turgid propaganda made my British ears shrivel; some sentimentality and over-larding rubbed me up the wrong way. "We're fighting to bring back these miles to the children's faces". . . Ugh! However, until then the film's duality adds to rather than detracts from its quality.

### International Co-operation

There were probably difficulties of joint staff work in completing the film just as there probably were between the British and American forces in Tunisia, but on seeing the film you are swept away by the tremendous sense of common purpose and you know that any misunderstandings or misgivings would be pebbles seized and carried off in the surge and stream of the great combined operation and its shared experiences . . . the suspense, the surprise of initial capitulation or resistance, the effort, the sweat, the blood, the toil, the disappointment at reverses, the common frailty of man, so easily prey to pain and death, the honest carrying out of appointed tasks, the monotony of waiting, the homesickness, the sorrow, the excitement, the triumph of getting the measure of the enemy at last, the final victory—all are shared alike, without jealousy, without fear and favour, but with a growing sense of mutual respect.

There is a good deal to criticise in the film, but this is not a review. It is a speculation on the possibilities of combined film operations.



# GOOD MOVIES ARE A MENACE

Quoted by BRIAN SMITH

*(My friend K considers that all the troubles of the film industry are due to good movies. This startling conclusion is a typical K-ism. It may be essentially true, K is seldom taken seriously.)*

WE HAD spent two afternoons of K's leave seeing two features made by the same Company. The first was a very poor story, carefully and expensively done, with a famous star. It was long and depressing, seeking to be true to life but lacking purpose of expression. The second was an inspiring story, genuine and pointed, but so shoddily produced that its virtues were obscured.

At tea afterwards I sought to apologise and K began: In those two pictures you see why most films are so awful. The Back Room Boys of the business want them so. It was one (or several) of them who originally accepted the two stories and decided one should be relatively costly, the other cheap. Perhaps the scripts then became wrongly filed, or the decision *which* should be the expensive one was left to clerical whim. I doubt this. You say the big money was obviously lavished on the wrong one, but you are thinking in terms of entertainment, art, or even culture, which is absurdly irrelevant. The Back Room Boys are *business men*. As neither story had any obvious (hackneyed) appeal, whichever was lavishly done would automatically become a prestige picture, the other a so-called attraction for better class halls. The bad one happened to have a possible star part, so naturally it was chosen for prestige purpose.

It is childish to grumble that this decision doomed the artists and technicians concerned to waste time, talent and rationed filmstock on the dull

story, and break their hearts scrambling to finish the good one, any old how, in less than half the time. What has this to do with *business*?

## Selling a Hunch

Both films will succeed. There is evidence galore that a commodity does not sell according to its own merit, but to the merit of advertising and the persuasiveness of salesmen. The main trouble where branded goods are concerned is that a person who buys a dud article is liable not to buy another the same. Fortunately, movies cannot be branded goods. One XYZ Corporation picture may be fine, the next a stinker. Can you detect the stinker before paying admission? Of course not. You develop a hunch. That's all. It's easier to sell you that hunch (right or wrong) than to persuade you to buy a guinea with a pound. More expensive, but easier: and in contrast, profitable.

Now even you, Smith, rigid idealist that you are (in matters which don't directly concern you), wouldn't begrudge a producer profit from a film which turned out badly in spite of all his efforts. You say you do when it's bad *because of* his efforts. Try to be practical and realise that bad pictures are the backbone of the industry. Even if advertising is truthful in its claims, no one will believe it any more than if it is untrue, unless there is much more of it. So, a good movie not only costs more to make, it also costs more to sell, and people go to the pictures every week, anyway. No sane person solely devoted to *business* would ever try to make a good film.

Those who do try are gamblers, artists, fame seekers. Their efforts



menace the stability of the industry because thereby the public is given a taste of better things and, subsequently confusing this Art stuff with similarly publicised staple junk, becomes discontented. The Back Room Boys have heard that you can't fool all the people etc., and so periodically make a great sacrifice by trying to turn out something good.

### **The Costly Dud**

The result is almost always an artistic monstrosity, but never a failure. The costly dud is sold as the latest and greatest of all masterpieces. If the public is no more than bemused into a semblance of respect—well, great art is never appreciated by contemporaries!

Critics who do not aspire to be journalism's brightest boys, face their task with integrity and thus seldom give unqualified praise. Who do they think takes any notice of their sourpuss grouses, especially when contradiction in the form of 32 sheet posters can be brought to bear? Imagine heeding a critic—one half column of print—against a glorious great coloured hoarding!

There is thus no need for critics to be 'influenced'. The only really naughty deception practised by the Back Room Boys is their assertion that public taste is difficult to gauge. This is naughty not because it is untrue but because it is an untruth without business purpose: a vanity. In fact, all a Back Room Boy needs is an accountant or Freeman's Arithmetic Part 1. Public taste is nothing to do with the job, except sometimes in the case of prestige pictures, when it is gauged—always wrongly.

The Back Room routine goes like this: a specially simple, non-technical script is placed on the desk. Attached are the names of the proposed leading players. It is not essential that the script be read—far less understood.

The names alone will enable an immediate estimate of the value of the final article made by an experienced B. R. Boy. The novice will have to do the following arithmetic: from the total revenue obtained by the previous similar picture, subtract the profit plus the cost of selling and distribution. This gives the production cost. Everything else can be left to the Front Room Boys—the technicians. They always do their best and are guarantee of a saleable product no matter how low the budget. Why? They have pride in their work! Besides they need the money and have ambition.

The only real troubles are caused by the irresponsibles who make good movies. They, and sometimes the technicians who are always trying to improve things, should be strictly controlled. It was their fault we had Sound—what they cost the industry that time! Only the most determined production of junk and nothing else saved the business. Not that it wasn't nice to enjoy a play (all Back Room Boys love the theatre and hate the movies), then buy it and have it shot with no trimmings. In those days you even knew what you were selling!

### **No Risks in Business**

When you, dreamy, unpractical Smith, say that the director, technicians and players should work for the public and not for shareholders you are being quite Utopian. It is indeed a truism that whereas an independent individual works better for good wages and the prospect of a rise, a group of individuals striving for corporate profit become reactionary. Good business is free from risk: that's all it means.

Now you are asserting that a business man who produces a good film deserves condolence rather than praise—as if that were not a plain fact unremarkable to anyone with both feet on the ground, politely conventional though it may be to pretend otherwise!



# Film Commentary

Recorded by ELIZABETH CROSS

'OH, IT WAS ever such a silly film, wasn't it Mavis? Flesh and Fantasy or something, but there wasn't no flesh that I could see. Oh, that Charles Boyer! No, I don't go for him. Flo does, but I don't. Got sort of a big face I think. Dark, why I wouldn't call him dark. Oh, dark hair? What there is of it, you mean. Silly sort of a film I thought. Fortune-telling and all, then you have to murder somebody. Do you believe in that Miss? No, my boy friend and me we were proper fed up with it.

'Oh, Flo went to see that *Garden of Allah* what you said you didn't like and you said we probably would. Oh yes, she said it was lovely. About a monk she said. No, she didn't say anything else, except it was coloured and ever so pretty.

'I saw a good one the other day though. No, I can't remember the name, I don't often, I'm funny that way. But there was Ginger Rogers and she worked in a store, see, and it was around Christmas time and then there was a woman just putting this baby on the steps, because she didn't have nowhere else to put him and she goes away and when the woman opened the door she thought Ginger Rogers was its mother. What steps? Why this Foundling Home of course! So they give her a rise at the store because they think it's her baby and then she was going to a dance and there was the baby in her flat. . . oh, you don't seem to understand plain English! Well it was ever so good, we didn't half laugh. Yes, perhaps it was a bit far-fetched, that bit about them keeping her on in the job and giving her a rise because of the baby, I daresay you would like to see the firm that'd do it. . . but I told you some of the films *is* a bit far-

fetched, but you don't always want to be thinking of the story, it seems all right when you're there.

'Don't you like Judy Garland? Haven't seen her? Cool! Do you like Veronica Lake? They say she's married again, no, perhaps that's somebody else I'm thinking about. Fred Astaire, oh, him . . . funny sort of a face. Oh, *dancing*, oh, yes, I suppose he dances all right. That dago chap with the little moustache, he dances lovely too. Oh, you know the one I mean, no, I can't think of his name but he's got dark hair with a wave. Of course Barbara Stanwyck's a wonderful actress, isn't she? I mean the way her eyes sort of glisten and shine at you, and she sort of pants, you can see her chest heave! Then Dorothy Lamour too. After all she doesn't *always* wear a sarong, she's such an actress really.

'Oh, no, I don't go to just *any* film. I always go once a week, of course, and I'll go two or three times if it's anything good. How do I know what's good? Well, you can see by the trailer what it's about can't you, and then someone's sure to tell you, or you read a bit in the paper that says whether it's a war film or technicolour or what. I like a nice bit of singing anyway.

'You know Bob Hope, well our Ted thinks he's like him, do you? Never *seen* Bob Hope? Well, what *have* you seen, Garbo.? . . no, I never seen her. I don't fancy I should like her, not really. They say she's ever so unfriendly. Of course they did say Joan Crawford got ever so stuck up too, but I've seen her in one or two, and she had some lovely clothes on. Bette Davis? Do you like *her*? . . . no, I don't, I think her eyes stick out. Flo likes her though, but then Flo is a bit queer. Noel



Coward . . . who *is* he? No, I've never heard of him. Oh, did he? I've seen lots of films about the Navy. but I don't know what the names were I can't say I know what they were about. I forget 'em as soon as I get out except for a bit here and there.

'Why do I go? What a daft question! The same reason as everyone goes to the pictures I suppose. What else would you do on a Saturday evening? Well, yes, I suppose if I had to choose between going to see a rotten picture and not going out at all . . . why of course I'd go. You can't stick at home, can you? You want a bit of life, don't you? After all, you get sick of dancing

every night. Concerts? Catch me! I'd run a mile. No, the pictures suit me very well, so long as they don't have too much of that travel stuff, and I can't bear *The March of Time*, horrible things. The News Reel is bad enough without anything else. Of course I like the new place best, its got a lovely organ, comes up from underneath-like, and they put the words on the screen so you can sing, It's ever so funny to hear them when there's a lot of "essess" in it, the whole place hissing!

'Honestly Miss, you ought to come in more often, it'd liven you up. After all, if you don't go to the pictures what is there to talk about?"

# An Open Letter to Oliver Bell

From KEITH F. BEAN

DEAR O. B.,

In time of war and other major disturbances comes a tendency toward increased dabbling with the superstitions and the occult. Spiritualism flourishes and with it elements which, shall we say, have less religion and certainly less scruple than most sincere spiritualists care to admit. Other examples of this probing into the supernatural are greater publics for astrologers, numerologists and palmists, and a boom for Nostrodamus and his like, a recrudescence of chain letters and "lucky" charms.

All this is said—and I believe wisely said—to be bad for morale, which is just a wartime way of saying that it tends to create a basically unhealthy psychology.

It is a question, then, how far fiction should encourage these superstitious searchings, how far those who create fiction have a responsibility to check or at least to avoid fostering them.

The question came to my mind forcibly when Paramount presented its version of the Dorothy Macardle essay in eeriness, *The Uninvited*. Because there is, I believe, a greater selectivity in novel-reading than in cinema-going, the question is more important regarding the film than the novel. Moreover, while the novelist is merely recording one person's version of strange events, the statement of the film tends to become a demonstration that these things can happen and can be objectively apparent not only to those who are directly involved (the characters of the story) but to millions of other who see them as spectators (the audiences). Thus what may be an excusable device in written fiction should perhaps be judged by very different standards when translated to the screen.

In *The Uninvited*, as you may know, the theme is the struggle of the spirits of two women in a haunted house, with one spirit attempting to frighten or



destroy and the other attempting to protect a young girl. The truth or possibility of this central thought is taken entirely for granted. Then it is bolstered by the whole gamut of occultist phenomena (all given without any attempt at natural explanations) which include poltergeist activity, spirit articulation through the spelling out of words, visual and aural and odoriferous, materialisations, atmospheric manifestations both chemical and physical.

Surely the whole argument here is that ghosts demonstrably exist and can be seen, heard and felt, that they can make sunny rooms damp and can create or snuff candles (both ordinary local-store candles not unearthly ones), that they can move pages intelligently to leave a book open at exactly the appropriate page.

### Mumbo Jumbo

Surely the further and greater argument is that these ghosts can dominate, for good or ill, the thoughts and actions of ordinary mortals? And surely that is where our question comes in? Isn't such an argument getting back to ideas of medicine men and pointing bones and witchcraft and the whole jamboree of dark and tortuous mind-twisting superstitions which an overwhelming body of progressive thought has rejected as psychologically and socially unhealthy and retrogressive?

*The Uninvited* is not isolated. It is perhaps the worst example of superstition-plugging, but it is certainly not the only one in recent films. We don't need to go back to *Flesh and Fantasy*. That after all left a question mark, or a philosophical interpretation or a psychological explanation—except in some of the minor achievements of the palmists and they could be explained as the normal cleverness or coincidence which are the mainstay of every successful socialite palmistry performer. No we need not go back to

*Flesh and Fantasy* nor forward to the fantasy and flesh of *Lady in the Dark*.

You remember the power and infallibility given to gipsy Pilar's reading of Gary Cooper's hand in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. You will note this same advocacy of the rightness of superhuman foreknowledge in *A Guy Named Joe*. Here Irene Dunne sees Spencer Tracy's bomber in a mist, immediately shudders and announces that Tracy's "number is up". It is not even a "hunch"—she knows it. Then she announces that you can always tell from an airman's face when "his number is up". There is no question that the man may be suffering from bile or worrying about his income tax to give him that look—it is a message from some occult plane written clearly and incontrovertibly on his face. Sure enough, Tracy dies on his next flight.

### Pseudo Religion

And all that takes no cognisance of the pseudo-religious, *Mr. Jordan*, theme of *A Guy Named Joe*, which teaches young airmen that there is some particular dead airman's spirit living right with each of them to see them through their difficult moments. Whatever their theology, many who see this film will question its central conception and the exposition of it.

Well, O. B., perhaps that and all the rest I've mentioned is wise; but I raise it because, perhaps, it isn't.

Incidentally, you remember that I wrote you earlier about the Hollywood pushing of all things American, sometimes to the point of distortion? This *A Guy Named Joe* is another example. It shows bombing of Europe from England, bombing over the North Sea from Scotland, Air Transport Command's activities, operations in New Guinea. It also shows local hostelrys and messes in England, Scotland and New Guinea where you might expect to see some of the locals. But throughout the film there is not one glimpse of



an Englishman, a Scot, an Australian, or any other non-American except half a dozen children. With that sort of thing it is no wonder that one of my colleagues reported from New York that thousands of Americans were dumb-founded when they read in February of the *first* American raid on Berlin; they had thought of all those earlier Berlin raids as American. Such misapprehensions may seem unimportant

in the winning of the Battle of Berlin or the Battle of Europe—"so long as the bombs go down"—but we have a long way to travel in United harness after that if the global war is to be won and the peace launched in real security. Time, history has shown, is sometimes the ally of misunderstanding. These things may be matters of higher policy, but they are certainly quite some matters.

## Vacancy—A Script Writer

IT HAS BEEN my lot recently to view a number of British films and I find that there is one feature common to many of them and that is, a feeble script.

The vital importance of the script-writer's contribution to the making of a film hardly needs emphasising. It is the very scaffolding on which the whole structure rests. Yet that department in British studios is all too often so deplorably weak that, in my opinion, it is the main cause of the failure of many British productions.

In all other directions today the British film is able to hold its own. We have the players and the technicians, we are able to stage films in a worthy manner. It is the script itself, the framework, that is so often lacking! Of course, this applies also to other films than British, but the progress of British production is my particular interest.

I maintain that British films at their best can compare favourably with the world's finest. Unfortunately, British films are too often *not* at their best. I recall recent instances of British films with several potential qualities of success—a strong and popular cast, an experienced and capable director, a competent team of technicians—the

script alone was wrong.

The function of the director is, of course, enormously important but, however brilliant he may be, he cannot make bricks without straw, nor can the players, however capable, do themselves justice if the script is poor and the dialogue put into their mouths is puerile.

I have seen a number of recent productions with stars of wide popularity and for whose pictures there is a ready-made and widespread demand, but which have been badly let down by the script. The prospects of these pictures I have in mind are extremely doubtful even for "fans" of the stars featured in them. Whereas, if only the script had been carefully prepared they would have been "dead certainties". Several films have had in their casts prominent stars of the stage and radio, but the artists have, whilst working in film-studios, been hopelessly hampered by the poverty of the material supplied to them. The result has been indifferent films and damage to their reputations through no fault of their own. That is the reason why certain famous artists have, in the language of the cinema managers, become "poison at the box-office".



The preparation of the script should be entrusted to thoroughly competent hands. It should be touched up, polished and repolished until it is as nearly watertight as is humanly possible. More time and more care should be given to this vital depart-

ment. If necessary, more money should be spent upon it. It would prove more than worthwhile in the long run. Otherwise the British reputation for making films will be seriously jeopardised.

H. H.

# News from Occupied France

BY ONE WHO HAS RECENTLY ESCAPED

THE FRENCH film industry is going through one of the worst crises that the cinema business has seen in any country. Owing to the high cost of production the impossibility of finding materials and the heavy taxation, only 25 films will be produced in 1944 according to the film correspondent of *Le Journal*. There is not enough celluloid, canvas for scenery, electricity or specialised labour. Night-time cannot be used for shooting because of the blackout and even make-up and *démaquillage* materials are lacking.

The average cost of a film, according to M. Louis Galey, the Managing Director of National Cinematography, has increased from five million francs in 1941/2 to seven million three hundred thousand in 1942/3 and the anticipated rise this year will be even greater. At the same time taxation is a spectre that stalks through the minds of all film companies.

In a recent report from the Film Industrial Organisation Committee, it was revealed that the fiscal authorities took in 1941-2 more than half the total sums cashed in by the producers. The figures for the following year show that in spite of a 20 per cent. increase in the price of cinema tickets, the exchequer will make more money out of the film industry than the companies themselves! 80 per cent. is the figure mentioned.

Another problem, strange to relate,

is the lack of film actors and actresses. This is not because they are any fewer than formerly—rather the contrary—it is because the revenue tax is so high that few will consent to act in more than one film a year.

Lack of studio space is another problem with which producers are faced to-day. As for audiences it is reckoned that the average yearly attendance is 310 millions.

A new project which is under discussion is the formation of a "cinema university". The idea is that it will train actors, actresses and technicians. Nobody will be able to call themselves a professional unless they have passed its examinations. No other people will then be allowed to take part in film production. This move, it is hoped, will reform the present situation for it is stated that the industry is crowded with inefficient technicians of every variety. Those who are opposed to the new idea which has been promoted by M. l'Herbier, a business man, point out that neither René Clair, Jean Renoir or a number of other famous people had to go to school in order to be able to produce first-class films. The wrangle continues.

Other items of news are that the latest junior star is Monique Thiébaud who got her chance in Pabst's *Jeune fille en détresse*. The famous Comédie Française is considering forming a film production society in order that



its members who by contract now are tied to the stage can take part in film versions of the French stage classics.

Lastly the education authorities are studying the possibility of dividing

films into categories from some of which children will be barred. If the plan is put into operation, it is intended that special documentary films will be provided for children under 16.

# THOSE CRITICS !

by *ELSPETH GRANT*

Nice to know that the New York critics are not panicked by public opinion or bamboozled by box-office returns! When these gentlemen of the press went into a huddle to decide on the best acting performance of last year, it was as if Betty Grable had never existed. No mention was made of this pin-up charmer, nor of Rita Hayworth, nor of half a dozen lovelies who may not be able to act but can pull enthusiastic morons into the movie houses. The critics were concerned with *acting* and they stuck to that.

Paul Lukas was voted almost unanimously, star-performer of 1943 for his superb portrayal of the anti-Nazi German in *Watch on the Rhine*. There were only two voices raised for other players, one for Monty Woolley in *Holy Matrimony* and one for Sonny Tufts, the sole genuine intentional comic in that otherwise inadvertently comic slab of sentimentality *So Proudly We Hail*.

Best feminine performance, say the New York critics, came from Ida Lupino in *The Hard Way*. The second choice, Katina Paxinou as Pilar in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, is one we can better appreciate and warmly applaud.

The New York critics had also had an eye to the direction of films during 1943. They chose George Stevens (now Major Stevens of the Army Air

Forces) as the year's outstanding director for his work on *The More the Merrier*, that charming farcical comedy with over-crowded wartime Washington as its setting, and Jean Arthur, Joel McCrea and Charles Coburn as its stars.

George Stevens had already a number of excellent films to his (directorial) credit; films which showed not only a sly and tart humour but also a sound understanding of social problems and of kindly appreciation of human foibles.

What undomestic woman does not remember, with an embarrassed chuckle, the scene in his picture *The Woman of the Year* where Katharine Hepburn struggles to prepare a breakfast—suffering, almost as Strindberg did, from the cussedness (or unco-operativeness) of inanimate objects.

In *The Talk of the Town* Stevens offered a shrewd comment on the difference between law and justice and in *Alice Adams*, his first outstanding film (starring Katharine Hepburn), an interesting study of a proud, ambitious daughter of small-town working-class parents, bent on creating a world of her own. These were all worthwhile pictures.

Runners-up to George Stevens in the directorial stakes were William Wellman, who directed *The Ox-Bow Incident*—a magnificent, sombre film shown here (though not, for some



reason, to the Press) under the title *Strange Incident*. (Maybe it was considered that a film on lynching might give the long-suffering London critics ideas, and was better reserved for the general public that does not know where to track the makers and distributors of tiresome movies to their lairs!)

Voting on "best director of 1943" showed more diversity of opinion

among the critics than that for the year's best players. Among directors favourably mentioned were Thorold Dickinson for *Next of Kin*, Fritz Lang for *Hangmen Also Die*, and Richard Rosson for *Corvette K-22* (renamed here *The Nelson Touch*).

One of these days perhaps the Screen Actors' Guild will get together and vote about who's the best critic. And what fun *that* could be!

## A Pictorial History of the Movies<sup>\*</sup>

Reviewed by HERMAN G. WEINBERG

IMAGINE A history of the theatre in which only American playwrights were mentioned, or a history of music in which only American composers were mentioned, and you have the sort of "history" that "A Pictorial History of the Movies" is. Mr. Taylor in his foreword assures us that the movies are an art, hence the analogy with the stage and music. Exactly two films, other than American, are illustrated (*Caligari* and *Goesta Boerling*). The entire contribution of pre-Hitler Germany, the so-called "golden age" of the films is ignored, as is the entire output of Sweden in its memorable pre-sound era (*The Witch*, *Phantom Chariot*, *Treasure of Arne*, etc.), with the aforementioned two lone exceptions. Russia, France and England are not recognised at all, save for a fleeting nod to *Queen Elizabeth*, a primitive French film of forty years or more ago. The work of Murnau, Dupont, Pabst, Leni, Lang (in Germany); of Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Dovzhenko (in Russia); of Stiller,

By Deems Taylor, in collaboration with Bryant Hale and Marcelene Peterson. Simon & Schuster (New York). 350 pages. \$3.95

Seaström and Christianson (in Sweden); of René Clair, Feyder, Duvivier, Renoir, Dreyer, Pagnol, Gance (in France); of Hitchcock, Korda, Carol Reed (in England); of Ivens, Storck, Richter, Dulac, Kirsanoff, Vigo, Brune and the whole host of the "advance-guard"—all these are part of the history of the films to Deems Taylor and his collaborators.

Perhaps Mr. Taylor meant only to present a history of the American film through his movie-stills. Then he should have limited the book's title to this. But even as such the book fails. There is not the faintest mention of the important work of Robert Flaherty, or of Malcolm St Clair and Monta Bell, of Harry d'Arrast, Paul Fejos and other fine directors, whereas many lesser names are given undue prominence out of all proportion to their merit. Stars one never heard of are identified to the exclusion of many fondly remembered, and some of the best work of stars and directors is omitted entirely.

Besides all of which, the errors of fact in the text accompanying the illustrations are numerous enough to be more than just transiently irritating.



What remains? A hodge-podge of pictures and text so placed that one has much ado, sometimes, to know which text is being illustrated by which picture

Meanwhile devotees of the movie fan magazines may rejoice in it, now that they have been officially recognised

in the literary world. Here is a book for them.

But it is to the history of the movies what the A.S.C.A.P.\* membership list is to the history of music.

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\* American Society Composers, Authors, Publishers.

# A Local Authority's Experiment

*Described by T. L. SPENCER of Bury*

THE FIRST necessities of a film society are a suitable hall and a good projector, and neither of these comes easily to hand these days. In Bury we are extremely fortunate. We have the hall of the new Technical College, and the Local Education Authority possesses a good 16mm. sound projector. These two facts have made possible, in the material sense, the formation of the Bury Film Group.

I was interested in films, so I approached the Director of Education and the Principal of the Technical College. I had in mind something rather less ambitious than the scheme to be outlined here. It seemed to me that since English literature and Dramatic Art were included in the curriculum of the Technical College they might also have something in the nature of Film Appreciation. When I laid my ideas before the Director and the Principal they both suggested that the main hall should be used and the possibility of starting a town film society seemed very near fulfilment.

We decided to advertise five experimental meetings in the local press. Meanwhile I was authorised to book suitable programmes. My experience of showing films to boys, both in class

and as part of School Film Society, led me to believe that there would be sufficient interest in this new scheme to make it worth while. I decided therefore to book as wide a selection of films as possible. I further decided that each meeting should be devoted to the showing of one particular type of film.

The response to the advertisement was gratifying. Nearly two hundred and fifty people applied for membership at an inclusive fee of 2s. 6d. Several others have joined since the scheme started. In these days, when so many people have so much to do, and so little time in which to do it, I think that the actual number may be taken to represent a very much larger number of people who are deeply interested.

Our programmes for the first five meetings were as follows:

First Meeting: "The Documentary Film," illustrated by *Men of Africa*, *North Sea*, *The River*.

Second Meeting: "The Film in Education," illustrated by *Mediæval Village*, *King Penguins*, *The Expansion of Germany*, *Soviet Children's Art Education*.

Third Meeting: "The Fantasy Film," illustrated by *Brahms' Hungarian Dance*, *Papageno*, *The Idea*, *Chaplin's Early Films*, *Drawings that Walk and Talk*.



Fourth Meeting: "The Feature Film," illustrated by sequence from *General Line* and *Turn of the Tide*.  
Fifth Meeting: "The Film and Reality," illustrated by *High Stakes in the East*, and *Film and Reality*.

The meetings were held fortnightly and it has been possible to arrange an extra meeting, to which a member of the I.C.I. film unit is coming to lecture on Film Production and to present a programme of his own colour films.

At the first meeting everybody was given a typewritten sheet setting forth the aims and objects of the Group, together with a few hints on what to look for in a film, and a list of books. One of the cardinal features of the scheme is that at each meeting I myself have given a general account of the type of film to be shown and introduced each film individually. In my opinion, this is a prerequisite of success. At the end of the session we intend to ask members for criticisms and suggestions.

### Our Aims

That, in bald outline is an account of the formation of our film group. Our principal aim has been to provide intelligent films for intelligent people, and in that I think we have succeeded. The purpose of a film group of this kind, however, is not only to cater for an established taste, but also to create a better taste in films among those, who, because they have never had the opportunity of seeing the type of film we show, are not interested in them. So far, I do not think we have done that. Our audience has consisted almost entirely of older people already interested in the better type of film. We are now seeking ways and means of extending our influence and membership.

Next year, we hope to co-operate in some way with the Youth Organisations in the town. Exactly how this will be done has not yet been decided, but it seems likely that a course in film appreciation will be included in

the syllabus of the Youth Centres, and this may result in the formation of a kind of subsidiary film group consisting entirely of young members. The programmes will be of a somewhat different type from those of the main group, providing not only "film appreciation" material, but opportunities for the members to extend their experience by means of the film. The aim must be, I think, to stimulate not only an interest in the film as an art-form, but also a realisation of its value as a scientific instrument and social commentator. In short to make them realise that there is more to the cinema than merely "going to the pictures".

### Difficulties Met

Anybody who starts a scheme of this kind, must expect and provide for certain difficulties and anxieties. The principal difficulty likely to be encountered is that of the booking of films. Experience has taught me that only by very early application and the naming of alternatives can suitable programmes be arranged, so heavy are the demands upon the libraries. All our programmes were booked two months before the first meeting. Here, I should like to pay tribute to the British Film Institute for its invaluable assistance. I would strongly advise any body starting a group of this sort to get in touch with it.

To sum up then. In Bury, this manufacturing town of some fifty thousand inhabitants, we have formed our film group—surely one of the very few to be formed under the auspices of a local education authority. We have held five meetings and shown a selection of films, all outstanding in their own way, to a group of interested people. There remains one more meeting at which a real film producer is to speak. Next year we hope to extend our activities upon more ambitious lines.



# Possibilities of the Film Strip

by M. CLAYTON

ONCE REGARDED as a not very reputable hybrid—a cross between the lantern slide and the motion picture—the filmstrip is now accepted in educational circles, as a device having merits and a technique of its own. It provides, perhaps, the most convenient means of illustration to large numbers of people, in small groups.

Filmstrips are light and compact. This affects distribution and storage. Before the war collections containing thousands of individual pictures were being sent to all parts of Africa, to India, B.W.I., and to such outposts as St. Helena and the Falkland Islands. Small consignments were sent by air mail. It is difficult to see by what other medium such wide and rapid distribution of illustrative material could be made.

## Virtues of Cheapness

The comparatively low cost allows for great range and variety. Of equal importance it makes frequent revision possible. Durability may not always be an asset. School buildings may stand firm as rocks, long after the educational practices they were built to serve have become outmoded! And are not maps and text-books kept and used after they have become out of date, because of high cost of replacement?

Filmstrips are used of course by all types of schools—primary, secondary and technical. Then, adult groups of all kinds, from Extra-mural departments of universities and W.E.A. classes, to the more social groups at clubs and institutes. Another very large body of users includes societies of all kinds, giving information, recruiting, making appeals and providing recreation—youth organisations, churches, libraries and government departments working through their

local administration. A wartime development is the preparation by publicity departments of the Allied Nations, of filmstrips illustrating life in their own countries; for distribution here and in U.S.A.

The character and general make-up of a filmstrip will be modified according to whether it is to be prepared for general distribution, or from material supplied by the society or individual who intends using it.

## “Extra-illustrated”

General stock films are obtainable for purchase or hire from filmstrip collections or Libraries. It is generally agreed that good range is available, covering most school subjects, and there is a possibility that these may shortly be supplemented by strips of topical interest, issued direct by the Ministry of Information. There would seem to be a wide field for the enterprising publisher who issued readers or text-books, “extra-illustrated” by accompanying filmstrips.

Subjects lending themselves naturally to use in this medium are geography and travel (particularly physical geography), history, architecture, art and general knowledge. Comparison between the still and motion picture is inevitable here. For scenic or geological studies the filmstrip is obviously well fitted. So with architecture and other still forms. For human geography a combination of still and motion pictures is very effective, and for industrial processes the motion picture is the obvious choice.

Speaking generally, impressions made by the motion picture are deep but necessarily restricted in subject and ground covered. The filmstrip gives width. With each picture the scene changes, and the subject is seen from



many angles and in many aspects. The resulting composite picture may come nearer to actual experience than the sharply defined but isolated impression given by the movie or the carefully selected text-book picture. This consideration applies particularly to history. Building up atmosphere from source or contemporary material is a slow and painful process compared with the glamour of the reconstituted episode. But the teacher who can make these dry bones live has laid the foundation of a real historical sense.

Physical science and nature study are not really well served by filmstrips, and under ideal conditions no one would suggest that they should be. The real thing, observation and experiment, wherever possible. But under present conditions the real work in these subjects can be helped by strips of 'background' type, and sets designed for introduction to, or recapitulation of, a series of lessons. Such would be biographies of famous scientists. Opportunity would be taken to use illustrations of which the originals were not available, e.g. comparison of foreign flora and fauna with familiar British types.

Almost any filmstrip can be used to provide exercises in oral expression. The conditions of display, semi-darkness with attention of the group focused upon the picture rather than the speaker, help to overcome self-consciousness, and the fact that there is something to see and describe, aids the pupil who is ordinarily at a lack for words.

### **The Limitations of Stock Strips**

General stock strips are most suitable for younger and less technical groups. When the upper forms of secondary schools, and even more when the stage of specialisation is reached, it is less likely that such general treatment will satisfy the instructor who has worked out his own syllabus and method. He, like the

societies and organisations, would do better to collect and arrange his own material, leaving only the work of reproducing this in filmstrip form to the photographic service. The societies will use material from their publications, photographs and sketches supplied by members, and so forth, as for instance strips compiled by the Youth Hostels or Young Farmers' Clubs. But from where is the individual teacher to obtain his illustrations? He may use camera or pencil himself. Travel Agencies and Trade Commissioners readily provide geographical material, old books and pamphlets help with history. Current book illustrations will almost certainly be copyright but permission is often readily granted for reproduction in filmstrip form for school use only.

Compiling a filmstrip is a fascinating job, from which the maker usually learns much. As a community enterprise it would afford opportunities for using all skills. Verifying facts and putting these into order, drafting pithy sub-titles and writing these: snapshots, sketch maps, drawings from nature, all can be found a place. A real chance of learning by doing, and a record of permanent value.

### **The Place of Letterpress**

The question of letterpress on pictures is rather controversial. It is suggested here that the less there is the better, unless it can be so complete that no conflicting oral commentary is necessary. But for general use it is undoubtedly useful to have the pictures simply named, and maybe for the different main sections to be indicated by very bold, simple sub-titles. Separate notes are sometimes asked for. Where these are supplied they are not for use verbatim. They serve rather to suggest the line of thought followed by the producer, and reason for sequence as given. It is then possible to adapt or modify as needed.

The fixed order of the filmstrip may



be regarded as merit or demerit. For use by societies a film compiled by the Centre, for circulation through branches has usually been carefully assembled and approved. It is then a definite advantage that the pictures cannot get out of order. But in teaching practice different arrangements may be needed from time to time. This has led to the development of film slides, individual 'frames' mounted between sheets of glass, forming miniature lantern slides. These offer great scope to the enthusiast, but for the instructor who has got used to filmstrip manipulation, variation of order presents little

## A NOTE FROM AFRICA

"I SAW quite a good film here the day before yesterday, about the first film I've seen here that's not absolute tripe. You may remember it—it was called *The Day will Dawn*. If, you did see it it was probably late '41 or early '42! The flicks here are more or less an institution, and everybody goes whether the film is good or bad.

There is only one film a week, which runs for four performances, at 5 and 9 on Fridays and Saturdays. The Saturday shows are for Africans and Indians, and the first house on Friday is the one that the officers always attend. We have to pay the outrageous price of 3s. for our seats, and it's worse for the 9 o'clock performance, when the price goes up to 4/50! The seats are pretty hard, too—none of the upholstery one gets at home. The sound is awful, either so loud that one can't hear, or so soft that one still can't hear. No half measures about it.

Periodically the picture just fades out into complete blackness while the sound goes on, and at other times the sound stops while the pictures go on. Invariably just as one reaches a particularly tense part of the film everything is cut out and a slide appears: "Next reel follows". This means a three minute wait while the

difficulty. By holding a sheet of paper a short way in front of the lens, the roll can be turned to and fro without distracting the attention of the class. When the desired point is reached the temporary screen will be removed.

What of after the war? There are doubtless many possibilities, and questions to be faced. Sizes and colour for example. But we should be inclined to deprecate any development which aimed at showing filmstrips to large audiences, or which tended to limit the material available to comparatively few highly attractive sets of pictures.

next reel is fitted, and is the signal for half the audience (that is, Indian and African elements) to go outside. They invariably return after the next reel has started, so that again one can't hear a thing even if the sound is O.K. This occurs regularly every half-hour!

If the action is a bit slow the Indian children and the Africans get bored and start chattering away—always in the normal Indian or African way of speaking, i.e. at the top of their voices! Then again, if it is raining, there is such a drumming on the corrugated iron roof that the sound is quite inaudible, while if there is any thunder and lightning the operator just switches off and waits till it is over before continuing."

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A CHURCH OF ENGLAND Films Commission, has been formed by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge at the request of the Archbishop of Canterbury to promote the fullest use of the film in the Church's work. Its functions include the establishment of an Information Bureau, a Film Booking Agency and a Viewing Panel, As soon as possible it will form a Church of England Film Library, arrange for conferences and lectures for the Clergy, Teachers and Students, and offer advice to producers of religious films.



# Film Music

## A letter from Darrel Catling

The Editor SIGHT & SOUND

SIR,

I was surprised that John Huntley, in his article "Film Music", made no mention of the musical works of Edmund Meisel and Darius Milhaud.

Mr. Huntley leaves the impression that not till 1935 was serious music specially composed for the film. In point of fact, the musical scores written by Meisel for *Potemkin* (1925), *Berlin* (1927), and *October* (1928) received extensive praise from those fortunate enough to have heard them; and Darius Milhaud composed the music for Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine*, which was produced as early as 1924.

### Pre 1935 Composition

While it is true that the general public were not aware of such specially composed music until about 1935, it is nevertheless a fact that good original music had been written some ten years earlier—though at a time when sound on film was not available to spread it before the world. I believe however that Meisel's music was subsequently recorded and synchronised with *Potemkin*.

Though Mr. Huntley covers one side of the film's musical sphere, he completely ignores (except for Fischinger) the extensive experimental work carried out by the other side: the advance guard on the continent.

Milhaud, in addition to *L'Inhumaine* composed music for Renoir's *Madame Bovary*, Painlevé's *L'Hippocampe* (Sea Horses), and for *Tartarin de Tarascon*, and *Voix d'enfants*.

In 1929-30, Maurice Jaubert wrote

the music for *Pays du Scalp*, and later for Jean Vigo's *Zéro de Conduite*. In this film, to increase the phantasy of one sequence, he re-recorded his music backwards! Jaubert also composed for René Clair—*14 Juillet*—and, over here, for Cavalcanti—*We Live in Two Worlds*. These latter films, moreover had the advantage of recorded music.

In 1930, Hans Eisler worked with Granovsky on the music for his film, *Song of Life*, in which a ballad was used as commentary to the visuals. In the same year he worked with Victor Trivas on *War is Hell*. *Kuhle Wampe*, likewise, received original musical treatment.

### Music for Abstracts

There is no space here to dwell on the mass of original music, unmentioned by Mr. Huntley; but mention, if only brief, must be made of the work of Hindemith, who composed music for an abstract film by Ruttmann; of Auric, who composed for *A Nous la Liberté*; of Jacques Ibert, for *Don Quixote*; and particularly of Honegger, for *Rapt*, *L'Équipage*, *Crime et Châtiment*, and *L'Ideé*.

*Drei von der Tankstelle*, *Le Million*, Lubitch's *Monte Carlo*, and (Mr. Huntley should have remembered this) *100 Men and a Girl*—are other films notable for their original use of music.

I hope this brief account will help to balance the rather one-sided article from Mr. Huntley—but perhaps his cinema going only dates from 1935!

Yours faithfully,

DARREL CATLING.



# SOME NOTES & NEWS

## British Film Institute

The Lady Apsley, M.P., has been nominated by the President of the Board of Trade as a member of the Governing Body of the British Film Institute, in place of Mrs. Cazalet Keir.

The Duke of Sutherland, its President, was in the chair for the tenth Annual General Meeting of the British Film Institute. In the course of his remarks the Duke congratulated the Institute on the practical realism displayed by its Governors in limiting their activities to tasks which they could accomplish. The temptation to fritter away their efforts over too wide a field had been successfully withstood. He also indicated some of the possibilities which lay before the B.F.I. in its next ten years of life.

As a result of a meeting with the makers of 16 mm. apparatus, the Institute has recommended to the British Standards Institution that it should consider whether it would not be possible to standardise certain parts such as the lens-carrying tubes, condenser lenses, lamp-holders and so forth. At the moment it is almost true to say that each model quite unnecessarily differs from its fellows. An encouraging reply has been received to the Institute's request.

A special memorandum has been written for the guidance of leaders on the uses to which films can be put in Youth Organisations. These include not only uses in connection with direct club activities but also the organisation of film circles, organised cinema going and even the establishment of Youth Film Societies. In so far as supplies are available, copies can be had on request to the Director of the Institute, 4 Great Russell Street, London, W.C.1.

A small informal conference of teachers in Junior and Central Schools has been held in order to discuss what characteristics are lacking in the present supply of educational films. A number of interesting suggestions were put forward not only on the more theoretical side of the uses to which films can be put in educational work but also on the more severely practical issues such as tempo, sound, credit titles and content. It is hoped to follow this meeting by another of secondary school teachers to discuss similar matters in relation to their particular work and needs.

## National Film Library

A special meeting of the Technical Committee of the National Film Library called to discuss the rapid deterioration of un-

stable films, ended on a more reassuring note (mentioned in the last issue of SIGHT AND SOUND). The experts came to the conclusion that things were not so black as at first might have been imagined. They decided that the results are probably in great degree due to experimental error and point out that all this testing work is at present in such an experimental stage that a satisfactory technique can only be achieved by a process of trial and error.

Another interesting matter raised before the Committee is the problem posed by single-copy amateur films of unique events. The point was raised on a bird film which shows a heron fishing. It is in colour and is so far as is known unique in the annals of ornithology. The Committee have agreed to copy this film and to raise the larger issue at another meeting.

Among the films presented for preservation are a batch from Paramount which includes *One Night in Lisbon*, *North-West Mounted Police* and the *Sign of the Cross*. The Polish Ministry of Information has also presented a number of its films and Columbia and G.F.D. have given a further batch of valuable and interesting features such as *You Can't Take it with You*, *The Arsenal Stadium Mystery* and *Pygmalion*.

## Scottish Film Council Activities

Throughout the winter the work of the Council has been going on quietly and steadily, co-ordinating and developing within the limits of its wartime resources.

At the request of enthusiasts interested in the scientific film movement the Council sponsored a conference where representatives of the English and Scottish viewpoint met and negotiated an agreement. Following this agreement the Secretary of the Council agreed as an interim arrangement to undertake the duties of Secretary of the Scottish Committee of the Scientific Film Association.

Another interesting activity has been the work carried through in co-operation with the Scottish Council of Sound Service. Realising that the viewing of films is more important than reading about films, a monthly conference has been inaugurated by the two bodies. Here representative films are shown to groups of officials of interested voluntary bodies. These "non-theatrical trade shows" have proved extremely popular. Two such gatherings have already been held; one for people interested in rural films, a second for bodies interested in health films and a third will be



held shortly on films for youth work. It is hoped to be able to extend and develop this service as experience shows its worth.

The experiment carried through this year in co-operation with the Scottish Library Association has proved a great success all over the rural areas serviced. The shows were welcomed and there is every indication that this service will have to be extended next winter. The Scottish Library Association is now busy planning how they will be able to organise this service themselves in the post-war period.

The Scottish Central Film Library continues to flourish. This year as was expected there has not been any spectacular advance. On the other hand, contrary to expectation, and despite the increasing scarcity of equipment the demand on the library's resources remains as strong as ever.

The Scottish Educational Film Association has had its most active season since the outbreak of war. The Council has been meeting regularly, and its sub-committees are very busy developing their various investigations. But most significant of all several of the branches have been more active than for some years. Ayrshire has had a very successful winter on production activities. They are now well advanced with their film survey of the county. Glasgow has also been very busy. The development of projector tuition courses, the new movement whereby S.E.F.A. branches and training and certifying teachers as proficient in the use of projectors has proved to be a great stimulus in Glasgow, and the various meetings organised by the Association this winter have been attended in a way reminiscent of the most successful period of pre-war activity.

The Religious Film movement is the one field where things have been difficult; but throughout the season officials have been busy reorganising, establishing the movement on a more representative basis. While the organised movement is, as it were, hanging fire, the use of the film in the church, particularly on the social side of church activities, has been greater than ever; and the interest being created there should lead to significant developments in the not far distant future.

### London Film Institute Society

A revival of *Alice Adams*, George Stevens's great film about life in small-town America, starring Katherine Hepburn, ended the London Film Institute Society's international season. Of the features and full-length documentaries shown two were French: *Lac Aux Dames* and *La Bete Humaine*; two German, *Das Testament von Dr. Mabuse* and *The Blue Angel*; four American, *Spanish Earth*,

*Winterset*, *Alice Adams* and *Nanook of the North*; one Czech, *Reka*; one Austrian, *Liebelie*, and one Russian-American, *The Russian Story*.

An attempt to show again some of the early National Film Library shorts had to be abandoned, after the first two sessions, owing to technical difficulties. But we were fortunate in being able to screen *Welcome to Britain*, Burgess Meredith's excellent contribution to British-American understanding which is not to be publicly exhibited here. Another short of special topical interest was an issue of *Ici La France*, made up from material just smuggled out of France and showing the training that is being given to young patriots in preparation for an Allied invasion.

A request from several members for a revival of *Winterset* coincided happily with the presence of Burgess Meredith in London. R.K.O. kindly made a special copy available, and Burgess Meredith told members about his work on this film which, largely on account of his magnificent acting, has become a modern American classic.

### Manchester and District Film Institute Society

The Society has completed its January-March Session with a visit from Mr. Paul Rotha, who gave a highly interesting talk to members on the present and future importance of documentary film production. He also showed a programme of films including *Power for the Highlands*, and *World of Plenty*. This and the preceding meetings at which *Amphitryon*, *The Emperor of California* and *Citizen Kane* were shown, have created a greater interest in the Society's activities, and brought about an increase in membership, which has necessitated the transfer of meetings to a larger cinema.

This development has also encouraged the committee to arrange an additional session from April-June of this year, when *La Kermesse Heroique*, *The Childhood of Maxim Gorki*, and *Le Dernier Milliadaire* will be shown, and in addition two sub-standard shows, one of which is to be devoted to "Aspects of British Life", and the other to popular scientific films.

Enquiries regarding the Society's activities should be sent to M. Reeves, 8 Burlington Road, Manchester, 20.

### Merseyside Film Institute Society

The Society has continued its monthly shows at the Philharmonic Hall, and in February presented *Lenin in 1918*, supported by *High over the Border* and *Listen to Britain*, to a crowded audience. There was also a full house for *Citizen Kane* in March, and many members thought this fine film even finer at a second viewing.



The supporting programme was *Calling Mr. Smith* and the disarming O.W.I. film *The Autobiography of a Jeep*.

The April programme was *The Nazis Strike* (the second U.S. Army orientation film) and *La Fin du Jour*. No film has been chosen for May, but a prominent film director has promised to visit the Society during the month if his various commitments will permit.

The Society is arranging a series of eleven 16 mm. shows for the Rector of Liverpool at the Parish Church. These will be held once a week from 18th April onwards, and will be given during the city workers' lunch hour. A comprehensive-non-theatrical programme, contrasting in international and domestic problems, has been chosen.

The Liverpool Co-operative Society Ltd. has invoked the aid of the Society in connection with its Centenary Celebrations, and it is intended to present a programme of films, with a social aspect, at the Philharmonic Hall in July.

### Film Council of the South-West

A number of successful week-end courses and film shows have been given recently. The first was for leaders of N.F.S. discussion groups. It dealt with the use of the film in stimulating discussion and the use of other visual aids in running discussion groups. The second was a W.E.A. Tutors' Conference on Visual Education, and this dealt with two main issues:— (1) the value of visual aids in elucidating theoretical points in a variety of subjects to students with limited educational backgrounds: (2) the problem of supply of visual materials and equipment. It was decided that a special sub-committee on visual supplies should be set up to investigate the problem. The third meeting dealt with straight educational films, and the audience consisted of members of the Association of Assistant Mistresses. The films covered history, geography, chemistry, mathematics and physics. At all these meetings, of course, the cry is "How can we get projectors?"

The cycle of researches on teaching with films is now in full swing in four Extra schools. Procedure is being standardised as far as possible so that the researches can be later repeated elsewhere.

### Devon and Exeter Film Society

The problem of Sunday accommodation has defied solution. The Society has now settled on Monday night, towards the end of a chequered but not unsuccessful season. The season was brought to a close with a performance of Cavalcanti's *Film and*

*Reality*. Close collaboration with the Film Council has continued.

### Aberdeen Film Society

The Aberdeen Film Society has been enjoying a very successful season with a satisfactory increase in membership. It has been most gratifying to the Council that members of H.M. Forces, men and women from the Dominions and our Allies in uniform have all availed themselves of the cheap tickets issued for their benefit to a much greater extent than in previous war years.

Since the new year *Circonstances Atténuantes*, *South Riding* and *Le Dernier Milliardaire* have been presented, and it will conclude in April with an all-American programme consisting of *Our Town*, *Power on the Land* and *Baggage Buster*.

*Mor Vran*, *In Der Nacht*, *Willie and the Mouse*, *Scottish Mazurka*, *Orkney Saga* and *Harvest of the North* are a few from the varied selection of short films shown, with John Grierson's *High Over the Borders* as the highlight of this season's shorts.

### Film Society of Ayrshire

The Society concluded its ninth season on March 12, having given ten performances at Ayr and ten performances at Kilmarnock. Keeping the flag flying has proved extremely difficult, and conditions have resulted in a sharp decline in membership of the Society, the present total being in the neighbourhood of 350.

Variety in plenty there has been in the films shown, with the members rather at a loss to say which programme they enjoyed most, but all agreed that their council had done a good job of work. The Soviet colour feature *The Little Humpback Horse* had its Scottish *première* at Ayr in November, and interest was added to this delightful film by a commentary from a Russian lady. *Reka* and a short completed this programme. Other feature films throughout the season have included *Catherine the Great* and *Tarakanova*, shown in successive programmes to form more or less a continuous story; *Derrière la Façade*, considered poor by French standards; *The Magnificent Ambersons*, with all the plaudits going to Agnes Moorhead; *La Femme du Boulanger* on a return visit that gave unbounded pleasure to two hundred French allies as well as to our members; *Trouble Chaser*, an experimental film bringing to the screen some of the characters of Al Capp's cartoon strip "L'il Abner." This most decided form of American humour did not reach some of our members, but most were agreed upon the excellence of the characterisations.



Shorter films included *Legong*, a technical colour film about which the council had some doubt, but which proved itself one of the top favourites of the whole season; *Land of Toys*, considered too long; *Men of the Lightship*, paying a welcome return visit, and *Beyond Our Horizon*, a strangely beautiful religious film of Norway.

Short films were in good supply and every advantage was taken to screen for our members as many non-theatrical releases as possible without upsetting the balance of the programmes. *Listen to Britain* and *Unfinished Journey* will remain longest in the memory.

### Belfast Film Society

The season now drawing to an end has been one of the most successful in the history of the Belfast Film Institute Society so far as the repertory shows are concerned—the chief wartime activity, apart from the regular publication of the Monthly Bulletin of reviews.

*Alexander Nevski* was the first show, followed by *Le Dernier Tournant* (*The Postman Always Rings Twice*), *Nanook of the North*, *Carnet de Bal*, *The Blue Angel*, and *L'Etrange M. Victor*. In conjunction with the Association of Scientific Workers a complete programme of films of scientific interest is being arranged as an extra show for members; and a further performance to wind up the season is being planned, possibly with *Lone White Sail* as the feature.

An extra performance of *Nanook of the North* was given to an audience of 1,600 Belfast elementary schoolchildren,—probably the first silent picture they had ever seen; certainly well received and enjoyed by a type of audience that is by no means easy to please; the experiment is recommended to other Societies and Education Committees.

Membership is average, but crowds of visitors, including Allied Forces in Northern Ireland, have enjoyed the season's programmes.

### Chester Film Society

The Chester Film Society is in a healthy state and will undoubtedly expand when peace comes. In February there was a show of *Of Mice and Men*, in March *Nanook of the North*, in April *The Farmer's Wife*, and *The Blue Angel* in May completes the season's efforts.

Two children's special performances have been given. At the first a questionnaire was issued. A preliminary survey of the results show that they are interesting but the full analysis has not been completed in time for it to be included in the present note of the Society's activities.

### Edinburgh Film Guild

Edinburgh Film Guild concluded its season with a membership of over 1,600, a record which the Society felt had been achieved without any lowering of standards. With feature films from France, Russia, U.S.A. and Britain, and from pre-war Austria and Germany, the programmes maintained their international flavour and documentary work in this country was effectively represented among the short films.

The Guild gave *World of Plenty* its Edinburgh première and Sir John Orr and Paul Rotha were present to speak at the performance. Visitors at a later performance were Eugène Cékalski and Stefan Themerson, two members of the enterprising Polish Film Unit: three of their new films, *Kitbag Songs*, *Unfinished Journey* and *Calling Mr. Smith*, were shown. *La Fin du Jour*, high-light of the season, provoked considerable discussion over Duvié's work. *The Magnificent Ambersons*, not otherwise shown in Edinburgh, was the feature film of a special American programme, the shorts being three new O.W.I. productions: *Swedes in America*, *Cowboy*, and *The Autobiography of a Jeep*.

The season's most ambitious programme was that built round *The Blue Angel*. Here the aim was to give an impression of the character of the cinema about 1930, the date of von Sternberg's production. The short films were *O'er Hill and Dale*, from the first group of E.M.B. films; Jean Epstein's *Mor Vran*; Disney's *Steamboat Willie* and *Skeleton Dance*; and a 1931 issue of British Movietone news. On entering the cinema the audience, in effect, stepped back twelve years in time. *Tarakanova*, with its spectacular settings by André Andrijev, recalled the success of the Guild's Décor Exhibition earlier in the season. The final programme, a lighthearted gesture, brought together Disney's *The Reluctant Dragon* and *The Little Humpback Horse*.

By the time the new season opens victory may be in sight and the Guild is actively preparing plans for the post-war period.

### Central Council for Health Education

*A Flying Start* is the title chosen for the Central Council's film upon breast feeding, mentioned in the January issue of SIGHT AND SOUND. The shooting of this film is now almost completed and it is hoped that there will be no undue delay before prints are available.

Scripts for a film upon the importance of good habits and cleanliness in children are also before the Film Committee.

The diagrammatic work which has been holding up the Council's film on posture



for so long is now ready, and this film gives every promise of being most attractive to general audiences.

From April, 1943, to February, 1944, films upon various health subjects were shown to 154,071 factory workers, and biology films were shown to 35,650 young people and 646 teachers.

### **Workers' Film Association**

The Workers' Film Association Ltd. have now completed arrangements for their Annual Film School which is being held at the Birmingham University from July 21st to 28th next. A representative list of lecturers has been obtained. The subjects under discussion include "The Future of the Film Industry in this Country", "The part the film should occupy in our social life," "The film as an aid to scientific education," "The Film and the Future of Man" and "Should a film actor interest himself in the social content of a film".

During the week many well-known films will be screened. Special visits will be paid during the period of the school to Birmingham's civic centres, Bournville, and the establishments of the Co-operative Society. Students are expected to bring their own cine-cameras, as shooting on location has been arranged.

In conjunction with the school a National Film Conference is being held on Saturday, July 22nd, at the Assembly Hall of the Birmingham Co-operative Society, High Street, Birmingham, 4, on "The use of the film in the solution of post-war problems."

For its full programme, write to Joseph Reeves, Secretary-Manager, Workers' Film Association Ltd., Transport House, Smith Square, Westminster, S.W.1.

### **IRISH FILM SOCIETY**

During the last season it was clear that the Irish Film Society was growing too big for its cinema. This year the shows are being given in the Olympia theatre, which with about a thousand good seats, will just contain the numbers for the moment. Nine shows have been given and the films shown came from France, Russia, Germany, England, U.S.A., Sweden, and Switzerland—not to mention a modest 16 mm. effort by the Society's own members, which was included on one occasion.

In February, a branch of the Society was opened in Kilkenny. Reports from that city indicate that the shows have so far been highly successful, and have aroused widespread interest. The membership of the branch is 160, which is much more, in proportion to the population, than the parent body has achieved in Dublin in nine

years. This is a hopeful augury for the establishment of other provincial branches.

### **Film Technique School**

The School of Film Technique, at the start of the present season, underwent a strenuous reorganisation. To supplement the previous purely technical training, a course of general artistic appreciation was added, designed to stimulate the imagination of the pupils, and to awaken their interest in the sister arts. This is followed by courses in scenario, direction, camera, and other technical work. Due attention has been paid to practice, each lecture being followed by an evening's practical work, so as to eliminate the very inordinate theorising which is the bugbear of all artistic centres. At the end of March, examinations were held in the various subjects, and the students acquitted themselves very satisfactorily. They were asked, among other things, to say which of a number of literary figures of the past would have made the best films director; to detect a dozen intentional faults in as many scenes of a short scenario; to make a rough production schedule for a film; and to pose and arrange actors for a given scene. Asked to select technicians for a hypothetical film one student caused some embarrassment by including the examiner!

### **Children's Shows**

The Children's Film Committee has been very active. In collaboration with the film trade, they have arranged a number of children's matinees in suburban cinemas. Members of the Committee have attended these to report on the programmes and the children's reactions. Preparations for the formation of an educational film library are well advanced, and a number of substandard films have already been acquired as its nucleus. The Society is receiving requests from all sides for substandard films, educational and otherwise, and a nation-wide distribution scheme has now been drawn up. As well as the educational films mentioned above, the Film School will contribute six films produced by it during the past four years. These include both story and documentary, and have a showing time of one and a half hours.

### **Productions**

The teachers' group has also been engaged in production. A film on zones includes some interesting cartoon work. During the holidays, a summer school will be run. This will give teachers an opportunity to study the various problems of the teaching film.





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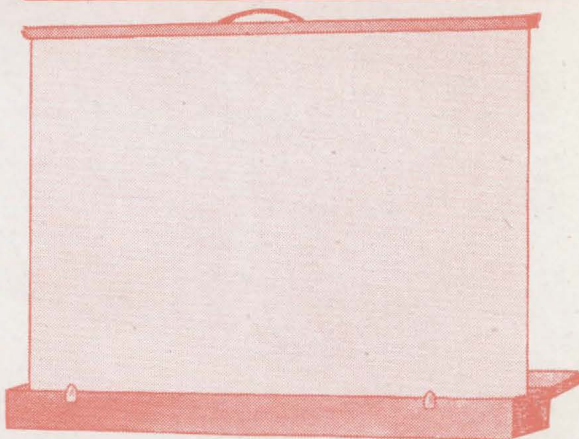
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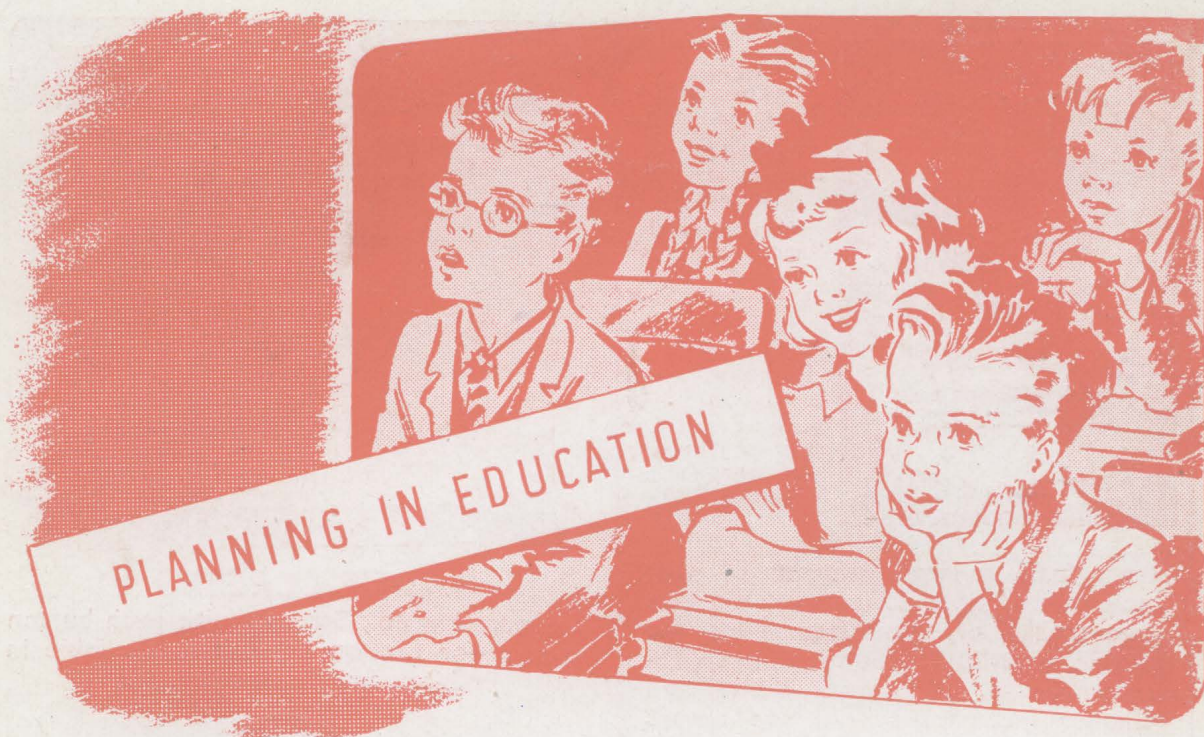
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